

Ten Observations for a Healthier Built Environment: Comments for Boston's Green Building Task Force

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Dec. 18, 2003 Panel Session

1. Prevailing wisdom and the U.S. Green Building Council offer guidelines for improving the performance of our buildings by factors of two. Projecting a doubling of the built environment some time in the second half of this century, we must be demanding factors of 10 improvements from our buildings.
2. A conceptual shift is necessary to create design specifications that enhance nature and human health as well as improving the social function of buildings.
3. Nature and health specifications must be introduced at project conception to leverage the greatest impact.
4. Project accounting for buildings must include full life-cycle analysis so operation costs are considered along with capital investment. Financial accounting must also include externalities of pollution and resources losses as well as and long-term benefits (e.g., productivity, health).
5. To build better buildings is not the sole objective. Buildings must teach as well as assist occupants (and society) to make wiser choices: exercise, transport, purchasing, eating, communicating and appreciating nature.
6. The current “linkage” requirements for developers serve narrow social and political objectives and should be re-thought to better serve societal and community interests.
7. Innovation in design is currently impeded by a myriad of antiquated, self serving, corruptive codes, inspections and approval processes. For example, to foster better design, we need to re-think the role of fire codes that are restrictive and lag woefully behind technology.
8. Good ideas for Green Building Design exist throughout the world—we need to be better informed so as to draw the best from those experiences.
9. Community wisdom is valuable however timetables and procedures often do not respect full participation.
10. Our institutions (Harvard, BU, City, State and Churches) must lead with examples that teach, inform and test new technologies and designs. Government, labor unions and contractors should encourage true innovation.